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What is Greensboro's DNA?



Envision the adobe walls of Santa Fe, or the red brick and copper-clad townhouses of Boston, or the streamlined pastel hotels of Miami Beach. Each place features signature qualities that

distinguish one city from the next. Just as deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) serves as a unique building-block for living organisms, cities have recognizable components in the form of materials and spatial arrangements that make them unique.

But what is in Greensboro's DNA?

Last week, this question was pondered by participants of a [public charette](#) related to the redevelopment of the Dunleith property in the Aycock neighborhood. Dunleith was the grand antebellum home of Judge Robert P. Dick that was destroyed in the winter of 1969 leaving a large undeveloped tract of land in historic Greensboro. The purpose of the charette was to explore what could be built back on the site to mend the city and surrounding neighborhoods.

Citizens from across the city were invited to participate in the study, which was orchestrated by planners with [Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Company](#) (DPZ). DPZ, an urban planning firm recognized for designing over 300 new and existing communities in the United States, is led by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The firm advocates and promotes traditional design principles that contribute to the sense of place, or DNA, of a community.



Here in Greensboro, the team explored neighborhoods surrounding Dunleith as well as buildings traditional to Greensboro in order to document features that are special to the Gate City. Led by principle Tom Low, designers Guy Pearlman, Monica Carney, Andrew Moneyheffer, and Chris Ritter worked with residents to create a list of Greensboro-specific traits.

Some examples of what the team came up with include:

- The use of outdoor rooms (front porches)
- A sense of history and context
- Retention of trees
- Use of native fieldstone, granite, and brick
- Organic parks that follow streams
- Eclectic design
- Interest in Green Building techniques

These character-defining features of the Gate City can be leveraged for the Dunleith redevelopment project. However, other projects throughout the city could utilize these themes as a means to combat the soul-less sprawl that can be witnessed across our region. With the exception of Green Building techniques, most of these features have been part of our community for over 100 years. An exploration of Fisher Park, the UNCG campus, or the Southside neighborhood will reveal many of these common features at work.

This exercise is not about recreating the past in Greensboro. Rather, it is a way to keep Greensboro's DNA intact for interpretation in new forms and features. The character of the Gate City, identified and recorded for redevelopment in the Aycock neighborhood, can be extended and continued throughout the city.

Greensboro may not be Santa Fe, Boston, or Miami Beach, but we are a city of natural stone, wide shady porches, ancient oaks, and meandering parks. Ours is tangible and cultivated character with our own style and sense of place. It is worth recognizing, and preserving and enhancing.



Category: City Planning By Benjamin Briggs November 26, 2008 1 Comment

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March 25, 2009 at 3:33 pm (Edit)

Looks like you guys do some amazing work. I wish I was that talented.

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